

THREE ESSENTIALS OF EFFECTIVE PRAYER

Matthew 6:13b-18

Intro: We would all agree, I am sure, that there never was, and never will be, a teacher like our Lord Jesus Christ. He taught the truth on whatever subject he was speaking. Much of His teaching had to do with prayer. This not only shows the importance of prayer, the outstanding importance, but it shows that we would never know how to pray without His instruction. And yet people talk about prayer as though they know how to pray without any instruction. That is another illustration of where our pride will take us. If we all knew instinctively how to pray, the Lord would never have given such teaching as we have here in Matthew 6 and in many other places in the Gospels where He spoke on prayer. So it is important for us, as it was with our Lord's disciples, to learn from our Lord *how to pray!*

In this very familiar prayer given by our Lord, we learn how to address God, we learn how to exalt Him in prayer, and how to pray for the fulfillment of His purposes and for the accomplishment of His will on earth just as it is done in heaven.

Then we learn from this prayer that we have both physical as well as spiritual needs, and that these need to be present to the Lord in prayer. When we do this we show out utter dependence upon Him.

And then the prayer ends much in the same way that it began: with the Lord! "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."

As we saw last week, we learn from this prayer a little about how we need to be praying for ourselves, and for each other.

Depending upon how we choose to divide the requests, there are either six or seven requests in this prayer. Let me point them out to you:

- 1) "Hallowed be Thy Name.
- 2) "Thy kingdom come."
- 3) "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."
- 4) "Give us this day our daily bread."
- 5) "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."
- 6) "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil," or *from the Evil One.*

Some might choose to make this last request into two requests. But however you might divide them these are the requests.

Today I want to take up the last part of verse 13, which concludes the prayer, and then move on secondly to verses 14 and 15, concluding with verses 16, 17, and 18.

I have chosen to call this, *Three Essentials of Effective Prayer*. They are not the only essentials, but they are three. And they are *worship, forgiveness, and fasting*.

Let us look at the latter part of verse 13 first, which is actually the conclusion to the prayer.

I. WORSHIP (Matt. 6:13b).

Those of you who are using one of the more recent translations will tell me that these words, “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory for ever. Amen,” is not in your Bible. The NASB includes it, but has put brackets around the words. The original ASV does not include it in the text, but has a footnote saying, “Many authorities, some ancient, but with variations, add, *For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.*” The NIV omits it with a similar explanation. Many of the commentaries ignore it. One commentator made the statement, “There is no reason to suppose that this doxology was spoken by Christ” (Maclaren, Vol. 4, p. 289). Citing textual studies he then went on to say that “the doxology has no business here” (*Op. cit.*, p. 290). *But then he went on to expound its meaning saying, that just because Christ did not speak these words, is no reason why we can’t use them in our prayers.* I personally find it very difficult to accept that kind of an attitude.

In the first place, what authority does he have for saying that our Lord never spoke these words? And secondly, where is it going to lead us if we say that He didn’t, but we can. Obviously we use words in prayer which our Lord may never have used, but I believe it is a serious thing to eliminate words from Scripture, saying that the Lord didn’t use them, but we can. No one can truthfully say that our Lord never used them. There certainly is nothing in them that would be inconsistent with the teaching of our Lord. And it truly does seem that without these words, the prayer would be incomplete.

So without engaging in a question that is more for godly scholars to handle, I want to include these words in my attempt to explain the meaning of the this prayer which the Lord has given us: “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory. Amen.”

A. “The kingdom” (v. 13).

We had this word in the second request given by our Lord in the prayer. See it in verse 10: “Thy kingdom come.” We know from the way this word is used throughout Scripture that it has to do with salvation and God’s work in our hearts, but it also has to do with a literal reign of our Lord Jesus Christ, not only on earth, but in heaven. So for the Lord to say, “Thine is the kingdom,” is to recognize that there would be no salvation, there would be no increasing sanctification in our lives, there would be no fulfillment of God’s purposes for heaven and earth, *if the work were not His!* None of what God is doing on the earth today was man’s idea. Man did not devise the way of salvation. Man did not plan the sanctification of sinners. Man did not come up with the idea of a new heaven and a new earth where we would have perfect righteousness. *All of this originated with our heavenly Father. The kingdom is His! The work is His! And it is important that we continually recognize this when we come to God in prayer.*

B. “The power” (v. 13).

When you look in Scripture at the work that needs to be done in all of our hearts, and even in this corrupt world in which we live, and then place beside this in our thoughts what the Bible says about the end times, how thankful we can be that the power to accomplish the work that needs to be done in our hearts, and the work which needs to be done among the nations of the earth, it is very reasonable for us all to ask, “How will it ever be?”

There is only one answer. It is not in you and me. It is not in the combined efforts of all of the people of God in any generation. *The power to accomplish what God has ordained to be done, is to be found in God alone!* If it were left us to man, it all would have been abandoned long ago. Thank God we can say, “Thine...is the power!” This is our assurance and our lasting hope. Isn’t this the truth that the Apostle Paul was teaching in Phil. 2:12 and 13 when he wrote,

12 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

Our Lord used a different word for “power” in the last three verses of the Gospel of Matthew, but the truth is the same. Let me remind you of what those word are:

18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the

name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen (Matt. 28:18-20).

And you will remember that when our Lord was speaking to His disciples shortly before His death about fruit bearing, He pointed out how absolutely necessary it is for us to *abide in Him* because, as He said, “Without Me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5b).

So what we say about the kingdom, and the power, applies equally to our heavenly Father, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. The work is Theirs, and the power is Theirs. It is not our work, nor our power, but God’s work, and God’s power – the power of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

And so it is not surprising that our Lord said finally,

C. “The glory” (v. 13).

Since the kingdom is His, and the power is His, then it must follow that the glory is His. And the glory is His, not just when the work is done, but the glory is His every day as we see the evidence of His work in each of us as well as in this world in which we live. And it will be eternally true, forever, that the kingdom and the power and the glory are God’s! And we can all conclude with a hearty, “Amen!” *May it ever be! So let it be!*

This is a verse that we all need to repeat every day in prayer. This is our hope and our glorious prospect that the great things that according to Scripture we look forward to, will certainly come to pass.

But I must hurry on to my second point.

II. FORGIVENESS (Matt. 6:14-15).

In these verses the Lord went back to deal with the one part of the request where we all would probably have the most trouble: *the matter of forgiving those who have sinned against us*. It is the fifth request in the prayer: “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.”

If you stop to think about this, I think you will have to agree that this is a greater problem with all of us than we are at first inclined to think that it is.

Let us think for a moment about our need for forgiveness. Many, many

years ago Solomon, in writing the book of Ecclesiastes, had this to say:

For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not (Ecc. 7:20).

Now you can take this as applying to a person who can be called “just” because he always tries to do the right thing. He obeys the laws of the land. He is faithful to his wife, and to his children. He pays his bills. He tells the truth. On a human level he can be described as a *just man*. But Solomon would have us know that the best just man that you could find still is a sinner. There are no perfect people on earth.

But what if we take this of one who is just in the sight of God, a Christian, a child of God. Unfortunately for us, this is still true. The most godly person on earth still sins. He may not sin to the same extent, or as often as others do, but he still sins! And since we all have sinned, and sin is against God, what do we need? We need divine forgiveness. In the final analysis, there is no one who can forgive sins but God. The scribes of Israel, not believing that Jesus was God, criticized him for forgiving the sins of the palsied man saying that God was the only One Who could forgive sins. See Mark 2:7. And they were right. There is not a day that we do not sin by doing something that we should not do, or by failing to do what we ought to do. Or we fail by saying what we should not say, or by failing to say what we ought to say. Or we fail by thinking what we ought not to think.

Solomon in one of his proverbs said, “Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?” (Prov. 20:9). The answer to that question is that no one can say that. Man can do a great deal to reform himself, but he never does a perfect work. He continues to be a sinner. You and I who know the Lord still sin. And I trust that this is to our great alarm and concern. We were forgiven through the sacrifice of Christ when we were first saved, and we continue to need the cleansing of Christ’s blood as we sin from day to day. And often we come to the Lord confessing the same sins, much, I trust, to our grief.

What happens when we confess our sins? The Lord not only forgives us and forgets our sin, but He cleanses us from all unrighteousness. See 1 John 1:9.

But what about people who have sinned against us? Let me remind you of a word the Apostle Paul gave to the church at Ephesus when he wrote to the church there. Here are his words:

30 And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

31 Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:

32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you (Eph. 4:30-32).

The sins mentioned in verse 31, “bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking,” all speak of resentment a person holds against someone who has sinned against him. But instead of being overcome with these sins (which are the fruit of an unforgiving spirit), you and I who know the Lord need to be “kind ... tenderhearted, forgiving one another ... “ Why? Because that is how the Lord has treated us. So you can see that an unforgiving spirit does not stand alone, but always is fed by other sins which are unbecoming to those of us who know the Lord.

In Psa. 66:18 we read, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me:” To “regard iniquity” is to see that it is there, to be fully conscious of what it is, and yet not do anything about it. People often live for years with an unforgiving spirit, and wonder why the blessing of God has departed from their lives. Let us not be that way, but even though people may not ask to be forgiven, before the Lord let us forgive them, and then we can be at peace.

But now to our last section which has to do with:

III. FASTING (Matt. 6:16-18).

What is fasting? Thayer in his Greek Lexicon gives this definition of fasting:

To abstain as a religious exercise from food and drink: either entirely, if the fast lasted but a single day, or from customary and choice nourishment, if it continued several days

In other words fasting means to go without food for a day, or even for just one meal, in order to give more time for prayer. It is an expression of a person's great burden for some special need.

We don't hear much about fasting in these days, but it continues to be important to the Lord. Notice that the Lord did not say, “If ye fast,” but “when ye fast.” These verses sound very much like what our Lord had to say about prayer. This, too, had been corrupted by the “hypocrites,” *the scribes and Pharisees*. See Matt. 23:14-15, 23, 25, 27, 29. As with prayer, the scribes and Pharisees were hypocrites because they prayed and fasted to be seen and commended by men. That commendation was their reward.

It is impossible to know how much fasting is practiced by the Lord's

people today because it is a private matter between people and the Lord. Men and women in past years who have walked closely with the Lord often fasted and prayed for the blessing of the Lord.

We have several illustrations of prayer in Scripture.

About the first one had to do with the time when a Levite had a concubine who left his house for four months, and became a harlot. He went after her because she had gone to her father's house. On their way home they passed through Gibeah, a city of Benjamin, and there were men in the city who were homosexuals. The Levite stayed in the house of an old man in Gibeah. After dinner many men from the city came and demanded that the old man turn the Levite over to them for sin. The old man pled with them not to demand such a thing, but he gave them his own daughter and the Levite's concubine. They abused the concubine all night, and in the morning she died from the abuse. The Levite notified all Israel of what had happened, and they gathered together to make war against the people of Benjamin. Twice Israel was defeated even though they had sought the will of the Lord about going against Benjamin. After their second defeat we read this:

26 Then all the children of Israel, and all the people, went up, and came unto the house of God, and wept, and sat there before the LORD, and fasted that day until even, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD.

27 And the children of Israel inquired of the LORD, (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days (Judges 20:26-27)).

The Lord responded to the people, and the next day when the Israelites went against Benjamin, Benjamin was defeated. So the people, in their despair, fasted and prayed, seeking the blessing of the Lord, and it came.

To cite an example from the Gospels, you probably remember that when the Lord and Peter and James and John came down from the Mount of Transfiguration, they were confronted by a man who had brought his demon-possessed son to the disciples, but they could not drive the demon out. After the Lord delivered the child, and the disciples had the Lord to themselves, they asked, "Why could not we cast him out?" And this is how the Lord answered them:

20 And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

21 Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting (Matt. 17:20-21).

This does not mean that the Lord always answers prayer when it is accompanied by fasting, but the blessing of God does come when the Lord's people show such faith.

Acts 10:30 tells us how Cornelius fasted and prayed that the Lord would somehow let him know how he could be saved. And you remember how Peter came to his house and preached the Gospel to Cornelius and his friends.

When Paul and Barnabas were sent out on their first missionary journey, we read this in Acts 13:2 and 3:

2 As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

3 And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

So fasting was often a part of the ministry of the Gospel.

In our text fasting is obviously for the purpose of prayer. It was never to be extended, most of the time no more than a day, as Paul mentioned in 1 Cor. 7:5. But it was commonly practiced in the early church. And our Lord promised that it would bring blessing, as He said in verse 6 of our chapter, about prayer.

Concl: Let us take these words to heart, worship, forgiveness, and fasting. Undoubtedly they can mean greater blessing for us all as we pray the way the Lord taught His disciples to pray so long ago.